DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 105 375 CS 001 685

AUTHOR Sinatra, Richard C.
TITLE Teaching Writing Styles through Visual Compositions.
PUB DATE May 75
NOTE 16p.;Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association (20th, New York City, May 13-16, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Composition (Literary); *Reading Improvement; Secondary Education; *Student Writing Models; Teaching Methods; *Visual Stimuli; *Writing Exercises; Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

A method for stimulating and facilitating organizational writing in the secondary school is described in this paper. Pictorial sequences are coordinated and arranged to typify the four major styles of writing: narrative, descriptive, expository, and persuasive. These sequences both portray a meaningful event in keeping with the writing style and help to elicit the corresponding organization of written discourse. A model is presented showing the pupil-teacher interaction in the visual-writing process. The model proposes that visual compositions can help generate the student's language and feelings to facilitate organizational writing of coherent paragraphs and, at the same time, to improve certain reading skills of sequence and organization. Teaching strategy guidelines suggest this student involvement in the visual-writing techniques before teaching lessons in style and organization. (Author/TO)

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Richard C. Sinatra,
Reading Coordinator K - 12,
Manhasset Public Schools
Manhasset, N.Y. 11030

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Richard C. Sinatra
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER.

ED105375

Teaching Writing Styles Through Visual Compositions

for presentation at the 1975 IRA Convention

Session topic: Reading Improvement in the Junior High School

Time: 9:00-10:00 a.m. Date: Thursday, May 15

CS 001 685

Why is the picture worth the proverbial thousand words? It's because the viewer has a language. The picture sparks a flow of thoughts as the perceiver descriptively, imaginatively, and affectively fills in the picture's parameters. During the perceiving moment, the viewer actively engages his thoughts and feelings to an understanding of the visual message. One's thousand words could be qualitatively similar to another's, neither richer nor poorer in expression, but uniquely idiosyncratic to three variables of communication: the viewer's language facility, his background knowledge and attitude toward the visual theme, and the visual persuasiveness of the message designer.

The mental processes involved in selective viewing are not unlike that involved in fluent reading. During the reading process, the reader actively participates in the verification of aroused meanings embedded in the linear format of lines of print (5), (17). The mental strategies of sampling, predicting, monitoring, confirming, and finally understanding of the author's intent would appear to be similarly applied in deriving meaning from a visual composition. The designer of the visual has combined objects, space, light, and mood and personality reflections to intimate a particular message. The viewer "reads" the message after he has taken the time to mentally coordinate the relationships among the design. The visual designer, like the author, strives for unity in his composition to communicate precisely and effectively. In achieving the unified

design, the elements of the visual composition have been balanced and related to the designer's intent (1).

The Trilogy of Discourse

While the fluent reader and viewer may engage in similar mental operations as receptors of communication, the writer and his counterpart, the visual composer, engage in the communicative process as transmitters. They use their respective mediums to organize and transmit central ideas. To influence, they sense out the thoughts and emotions of their intended audiences so that they will be suitably responsive and receptive to specific messages (6).

The following analogous relationship is therefore suggested regarding these participants in the communication process:

THE READER : THE WRITER :: THE VIEWER : THE VISUAL COMPOSER

The processes of selective viewing and designing of visual composition would appear to be related in active mental organization, just as good reading and writing depend upon clear and logical thinking (9). Moffett's thesis regarding the functional role of discourse in the English curriculum sheds light on the reasons for potential communication gaps between receiver and transmitter. He writes (10):

> I have suggested structuring English curriculum according to the relations of speaker-listener-subject as the ultimate context within which all our other concerns may be handled functionally and holistically, moving the student in his writing and reading from one kind of actual discourse to the next in a sequence which permits him to learn style,

> logic, semantics, rhetoric, and literary form continuously through practice as first or second person. Ideally this sequence would correspond both to his own intellectual and emotional growth... The structure of the subject must be meshed with the structure of the student. A major failure of education has been to consider the logic of one almost to the exclusion of the psychologic of the other.

If the elements of discourse are the transmitter, the receiver, and the message, it is the preoccupation with the teaching of the understanding and interpretation of the latter that becomes an overriding concern of the language arts curriculum. The use of visuals to engage students in the activities of discourse - reflecting, writing, and reading - could provide a bridge, a common message bond, between the student writer and the class group receptors.

The Use of Visuals to Facilitate Discourse

Sources have commented on the implementation of visuals to stimulate language usage and expansion in the school setting. Advice to teachers of English (18); pocket books for student use (7), (8), (14); and a filmstrip program (15) have suggested the use of pictures and visual sequences to generate oral and written expression. A visual strategy plan provided concrete suggestions for the secondary teacher to assist students in the improvement of paragraph organization (13). More recently, in an article tracing the history of the Visual Literacy movement, Debes and Williams (3) described current programs for younger children in which visual/verbal connections were made to facilitate reading and writing skills.

How could the teacher logically prepare to use the power of visuals to not only stimulate students' language facility but also to get to the deeper concerns of unity, coherence, and transition in paragraph organization? One way to do this would be to restructure the analogous relationship suggested earlier in this paper regarding the participants in the communication process. The teacher would become the visual composer to facilitate students' functional usage of thinking, writing, and reading of categories of discourse. The "what to teach" of language surface structure would be a product of "how" the student processed his thinking and writing facility in relation to the visual composition. Written composition would be a projection of visual organization; transcribing, as a product of thought. This teacher/pupil interaction would accordingly be represented:

THE VISUAL COMPOSER (Teacher) → THE VIEWER (Student) = THE WRITER (Student) = THE READER (Student)

The transposition of order implies that a reading proficiency of categories of discourse could become an outcome and a by-product of writing involvement. This suggestion is invariant to the commonly accepted notion of the logical sequence of skills progression in the language arts curriculum, that is, that facility with reading should precede facility with writing. Yet, through the process of writing as an outgrowth of mental organization stimulated by visual composition, students could be led to understand

writers' techniques of paragraph organization. This could then generalize to an understanding of the organization of discourse in the content area subjects.

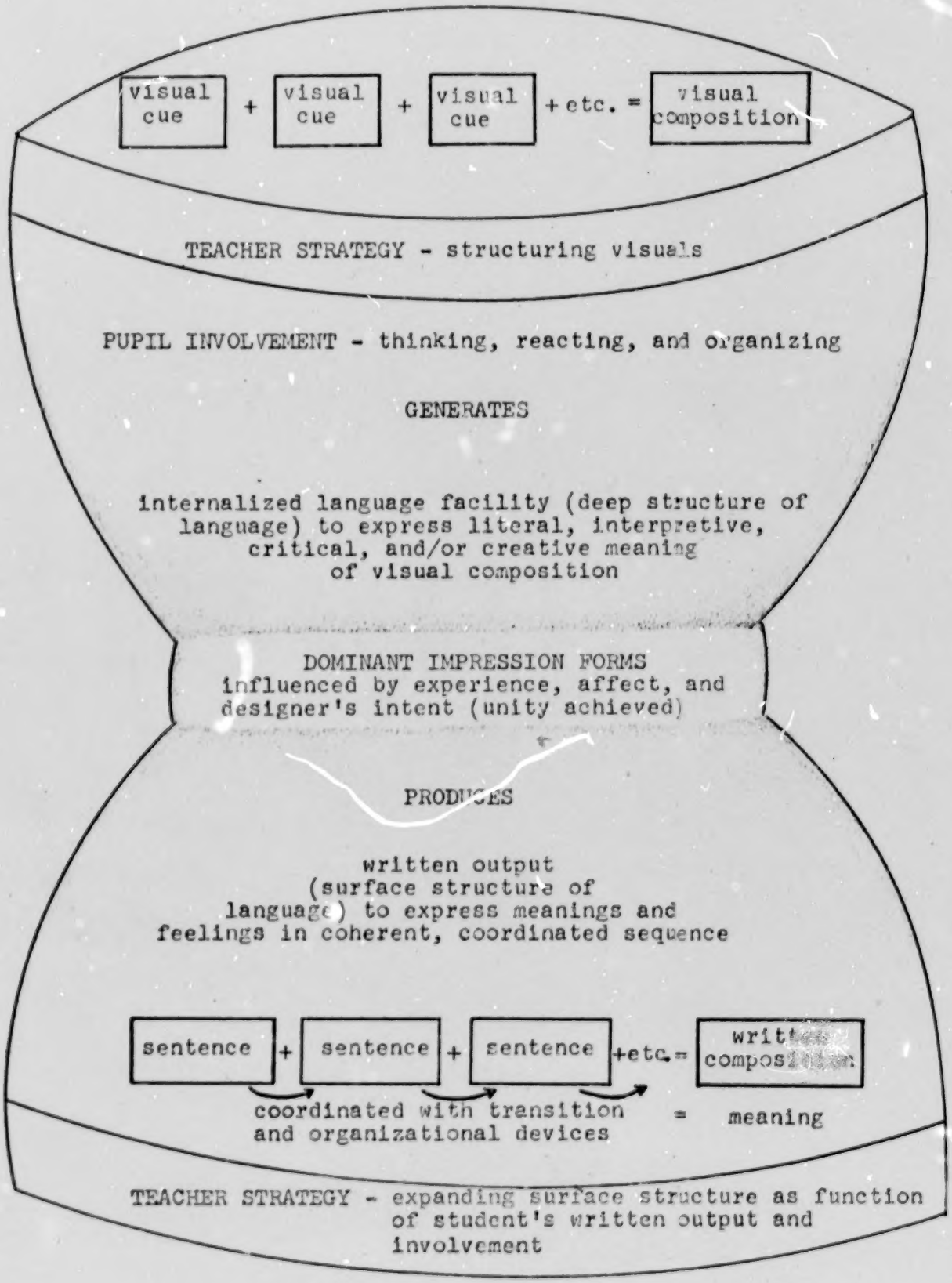
The Four Categories of Discourse

The four traditional categories of discourse - narration, description, exposition, and argumentation - could provide the global backdrop for visual composition as they do for written composition. Teachers could turn to many excellent sources to investigate more fully the thought processing involved in composing and reading each of the four categories. Some student texts are conveniently organized according to these four styles (2), (4). Another is arranged into major lessons on reading and writing descriptive, narrative, and expository paragraphs (9). A theoretical framework for the growth of discourse outward from the child's ability to express himself to himself provides a conceptual point-of-view (10), while a sequential curriculum made up of particular practices and assignments for children of differing grade levels provides a practicum (11). The secondary school student's analysis of organizational structure could be further sharpened with critical reading of selected passages by famous authors (12).

A Model: Illustrating the Use of Visuals to Generate Writing

A model is conceptualized in the shape of an hour glass (see Illustration 1.) to graphically illustrate the teacher-pupil interaction in the process of bridging from visual composition to literary composition. A key strategy

Illustration 1. Model of Teacher/Pupil Interaction in Visual/Literary Composition


visual cue + visual cue + visual cue + etc. = visual composition
TEACHER STRATEGY - structuring visuals
PUPIL INVOLVEMENT - thinking, reacting, and organizing
GENERATES
internalized language facility (deep structure of language) to express literal, interpretive, critical, and/or creative meaning of visual composition
DOMINANT IMPRESSION FORMS influenced by experience, affect, and designer's intent (unity achieved)
PRODUCES
written output (surface structure of language) to express meanings and feelings in coherent, coordinated sequence
sentence + sentence + sentence + etc. = written composition
coordinated with transition and organizational devices
= meaning
TEACHER STRATEGY - expanding surface structure as function of student's written output and involvement

implied is that written expression is a function of the process of using one's language and not a product of being instructed "how to write". Therefore, this model may be antagonistic to those secondary school teachers who teach grammar and usage as distinct curriculum "units" apart from the function of composition.

An inquiry approach of the study of the surface structure of language, particularly grammar, may be unsettling to teachers since the results of student direction in writing may neither be predictable nor controllable (16). Children writing from cues in visual sequences could produce examples of form and style that contradict the language concepts the teacher holds or that do not mesh with the rules of standardization he knows. For example, when Curtis, a 16 year-old sophomore saw a bullfight sequence, he wrote to describe one aspect of the action, "The matador is swording the bull". Incorrect verb usage is the error of English, but that particular scene was poignantly expressed. Since Curtis will be dealing with a reexamination of his own living language after visualizing and usage, he may find the study of language more interesting and meaningful.

Steps in the Teacher/Pupil Interaction of the Writing Process

1. Teacher Structuring: Teacher input is called for at the beginning and end of the composition process. Initially the teacher as visual composer structures a visual composition with the intended pupil outcome of written composition generally organized according to one or a combination of the

four categories of discourse. For instance, if the teacher wishes to evoke a descriptive-type paragraph, a scene could be filmed where objects and/or people are located in visual proximity to each other. In this way a spatial organization would be implied and the relating of this spatial relationship will help organize the student's writing. The student would be prompted to use transition words and phrases such as, "by the...,behind the..., across from the...,"etc. On the other hand, if the goal was to portray an expository type organization, a scene such as a group of girls baking a cake or another group replacing parts on a car could be shot. The major point is not to film just the finished cake or the renovated car, but to shoot each step in the process of the sequential action so that the student would be led into this type of organization. The student would then be cued to use transition words such as, "next..., after that..., finally,"etc., that lend coherence to an expository paragraph.

The visual composer must look out into the world for visual compositions that can be captured or that have been captured on photograph. A visual composition is,in essence, a sequence of pictures that infers a unified meaning. The visual composition will unravel threads of meaning step-by-step before students' eyes. Almost any life experience can become context for the visual message. The actual text, the written message, will be supplied by the student writer.

2. Formulating the Dominant Impression: The teacher will show the visual composition to a captivated student audience whose eyes are directed towards one focal point. Once the first visual is shown, each student's mental processing begins. He starts to predict meaning from forthcoming visuals, samples cues from visuals in focus to verify and confirm meaning, and attempts to recall meaning from cues of previously shown visuals that associate with on-going meaning. Unlike television or the movies where the speaker's or narrator's language is "in context" with the visualized scene, this strategy asks the student to supply his language and reactions to visual sequences that come from the world about him. Since all students are unique in their internalized facility with language and in their attitudes toward certain topics, this involvement could generate differing levels of meaning in written discourse, i.e. literal, interpretive, critical, and or creative. The range could run from a straight literal description of what was viewed to a creative written work that was touched off by an inferred meaning of the visual message.

Whatever level the student achieves, it becomes important for the sake of unity, organization, and clarity that he formulates his dominant impression of the meaning he feels. This necessitates at least two showings of the entire visual sequence. After the first showing, which was to establish the meaning of the whole, this dominant impression should form. This suggests more input than just arriving at the main idea. Not only should the student be influenced

by the concrete meaning and asked to explicate the central idea of that sequence, but also he should be asked to react to that meaning. In this way he will arrive at a point-of-view that will organize both his affect and his language on that topic. This desired outcome takes training for those pupils who have difficulty getting beyond the literal level of meaning.

3. Jotting Down: However, whatever level of meaning the student generates in the dominant impression sentence, this point-of-view becomes the unifying element of the written composition. For instance, after viewing the cake baking sequence, Gloria literally writes, "The three girls baked a cake for the class party", while Sarah sitting alongside, writes on a more interpretive and creative level, "Baking a cake can be a messy but tasty business." Each girl having internalized meaning at different levels must select visual cues during the second viewing that relate to their own unifying impression.

"Context clues" that relate to this dominant impression are abstracted from each visual frame in the sequence. These clues must also relate to ideas suggested by visuals before and after the one that is serving as the stimulus for writing so that a smoothness of paragraph sequence is achieved. As each student jots down ideas and suggestions from particular frames, he should also use those transitional words and phrases that will help lend continued coherence and smoothness in the relationships described in the paragraph.

4. Polishing: When the student has completed this joint viewing and writing activity, he should be given time to smooth out the roughness of the jotted down fragments. He will still be able to visualize the meaning of what he saw and this will also aid in the completion of the finished product, a coherent paragraph or composition.

5. Teaching: Now the teacher interacts with his class group to expand surface structure language growth and development. While these strategy possibilities are numerous, the teacher should also direct a major effort to an analysis of the style of writing that students followed and whether this style was exemplified and aided by the visual composition. Since the class group has been mentally involved in the conceptualizing of a particular category of discourse, the process of organization, they may be able to perceive this self-same structure more readily in reading experiences, the content of process. This awareness will strengthen overall facility with discourse and the students' ability to relate central ideas to supportive ones in writers' organizational structure.

The teacher's greatest advantage at this point is that a common communicative denominator is shared by the class group. Therefore, the individuals within the group shift roles as transmitters and receivers of the message of written discourse as discussion and analysis occurs of individual written compositions. Specific examples of student's writings that established decisive dominant impression, that were vivid representations of particular scenes or actions, that connected ideas before and after in the sequence,

that utilized figurative language to capture the essence of a particular impression, or that developed the organizational structure intended would be relevant to all members of the class group since the experience remains in the "mind's eye".

In conclusion, this model of teaching form and function of written discouse has in essence meshed the structure of the subject with the structure of the student (10). While the burden is placed on the teacher as visual composer, the outcome of unified and coherent writing will be rewarding indeed. The teacher must fully share in the belief that organized written discourse can be a realistic goal for all students. This model provides a method for tying language to concrete visual experiences and a basis for the organization of thoughts regardless of one's facility with the surface structure of language.

REFERENCES

1. Bay, Stuart and William Thorn. Visual Persuasion. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich, Inc., 1974.

2. Baer, Louise and Harriet Haug. Success in Writing,4. Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1970.

3. Debes, John and Clarence Williams. "The Power of Visuals," Instructor, December 1974, 31-38.

4. Gehlmann, John and Philip Eisman. Say What You Mean,Book Two:The Paragraph. New York: Odyssey Press,Inc., 1968.

5. Goodman, Kenneth. "Reading Diagnosis Today...An Intimate Analysis of the Reader," in Time Frame. New York: Nassau BOCES, Research and Development Division, Vol. 3, No.2, Spring 1974, 13-15.

6. Heintz, Ann Christine. Persuasion. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1970.

7. Leavitt, Hart Day. The Writer's Eye. New York: Bantam Pathfinder Edition, 3rd Printing, 1969.

8. Leavitt, Hart Day and David Sohn. Stop, Look, and Write. New York: Bantam Pathfinder Edition, 12th Printing, 1969.

9. McCart, William. Reading/Writing Workshop 9. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1968.

10. Moffett, James. Teaching the Universe of Discourse. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1968.

11. Moffett, James. A Student Centered Language Arts Curriculum, Grades K-13: A Handbook for Teachers. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1973.

12. Pauk, Walter. Perceiving Structure; A Skill at a Time Series. Providence,R.I: Jamestown Pub., 1975.

13. Sinatra, Richard. paper presented at the 26th Annual New York State Communications Convocation, November 6-9, 1973.ERIC, EDRS, P.O. Drawer O, Bethesda, Md.

14. Sohn, David. Pictures for Writing. New York: Bantam Pathfinder Edition, 1969.

15. Sohn, David. Come to Your Senses: A Program in Writing Awareness. New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1970.

16. Smith, E. Brooks, Kenneth Goodman, and Robert Meredith. Language and Thinking in the Elementary School. New Yor: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1970, Chapter 9.

17. Smith, Frank. Understanding Reading. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1971.

18. West, William. "Parallels in Visual and Verbal Composition", in Proceedings of the First National Conference on Visual Literacy, ed. Clarence Williams and John Debes. New York: Pittman Pub. Co., 1970, 270-273.